

NEWPORT NEWS, VA.
PRESSM. 55,032
S. 54,190

Let's Get Full Story On John Birch Society

The John Birch Society has been in existence well over two years; it now reportedly has chapters in thirty-four states (among them Virginia) and the District of Columbia, and among its members are numerous well-known and highly respected individuals.

Until a few weeks ago, only relatively few Americans had even heard the group's name mentioned. But now it is the center of a storm of controversy that is almost certain to grow in intensity; before too long, every literate citizen will be aware of the John Birch Society's existence and most of us will have strong opinion on the subject.

The Society has been causing a stir in California for some time; there it is already being subjected to a sharp scrutiny indeed—not because of its objectives, which are most laudable, but due to its alleged methods of operation, and certain statements attributed to its founder. Governor Edmund G. Brown has ordered an investigation of the group by the state attorney general, and the State Senate's Un-American Activities Committee has slated a hearing for June.

The cries for an inquiry attained national scope the past week. On Thursday, Senator Kuchel (R-Calif.) asserted the Senate Government Operations Committee should look into the Society's operations and particularly the charges its founder has leveled against high-ranking government officials. On the same day Rep. Reuss (D-Pa.) released correspondence in which he had asked for an inquiry by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Chairmen of both committees have said they don't think their groups have jurisdiction to hold such an investigation. We cannot judge whether this is their final word on that question.

The Society's primary goal is to wipe out communism and communist influences in this country—a noble objective indeed. But its leader and founder, Robert Welch of Belmont, Mass., has been quoted at length in remarks and charges that are on the face of them absurd. His assertion that former President Eisenhower, his brother,

Dr. Milton Eisenhower, the late Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and his brother, Central Intelligence Agency head Dulles, have been members of the communist underground is a smear of a type that recalls to mind the communist "big lie" technique.

Indeed, there is much about Mr. Welch's quoted statements to recall the tactics of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy. But it is by no means to be assumed that all of the Society's members or any appreciable number are willing to throw away the constitutional guarantees of the rights of the individual, to blast the innocent along with the guilty, and generally to adopt totalitarian methods even in fighting communism. Many of these members are no doubt both patriotic and able.

It may be, as Rep. Edgar Heistand (R-Calif.) a member of the Society, has asserted, there has been much misinformation disseminated about the group. He says the members are individualists; that their violent opposition to communism is the one thing they have in common. He has been quoted as considering putting on the record a "well-documented" answer to critics of the organization; since most of what has come out thus far has been strong criticism, his answer will be awaited with great interest.

There are congressmen lined up already on both sides in the controversy—the Society has been denounced from the floor of the Senate by Senators Kuchel, Young (R-N.D.) and Dodd (R-Conn.) and there has been criticism too from the House as noted above. And in the House of Representatives others have expressed sympathy with the organization. So this isn't likely to be only a tempest in a teapot; we'll expect a great deal more to be said on both sides. Since so much has already been said the reputations of so many obviously well-intentioned men are involved on both sides, the "fully documented" statement Representative Heistand contemplates is vitally needed. After that is made there'll be time enough to determine whether formal investigation of the Society is in order.